

TOWN PLANNING*

By THOMAS ADAMS

Town Planning Adviser, Commission of Conservation

IN preparing development schemes for cities, towns, rural districts and regional areas, we simply exercise foresight, common sense and business judgment in regard to all questions relating to civic growth and civic welfare. The first question to be considered in the planning of any kind of area is the question of its industry—using the word in the broad sense as representing the whole of its productive, industrial and commercial undertakings. Industry is the condition of community's being. Health, convenience, beauty, are the conditions of its well-being. The being of the city depends upon the units of its industrial organization which provide the necessities of life, food and clothing, shelter and social intercourse, to the community—to society in its different grades and forms. A city can exist only so long as it has the means of securing these necessities, even if it has not health, convenience and beauty.

Well-Being As Distinguished From Being

But in modern life and in the large conglomerations of population which we call cities, we cannot merely exist; we must have facilities for enjoying those things which represent the well-being of the city. These things are health of mind and body—promoted by good housing, by educational facilities, by park systems and other things which contribute to the building up of physique and mental faculty. Secondly, in addition to health of body and mind, there is the question of convenience, including adequate means of transportation; co-operation between separate industries—in the matter of securing convenient distribution of the products; suitable opportunities for making the best of and getting the cheapest power; facilities for providing healthy housing for those who, after all, in their labor, provide the chief raw material of industry. Thirdly, there is the question of beauty or agreeableness in connection with the building up of the city; beauty and refinement in the home, beauty and refinement in the home of the poor as well as in the home of the rich—beauty and refinement in the public place, in the boulevard and in the civic centre. These things represent the coping stone of the city structure, but at the foundation we have the industrial organization and next the healthy home in which the unit of the city, the family, has to live.

Now, this question is no mere city question. It is not even a national question. It is a nation-wide question, affecting every organized community, whether city or town or village. One of the first things to consider is the radial lines of communication by road and rail, and the means of connection between those radial lines so as to distribute traffic to the best advantage. There is a constant inflow of rural population into cities and towns from the rural districts, and the future prosperity of the cities and towns depends upon maintaining a healthy and vigorous race in the rural territory of the state. Then from the provincial standpoint we have to consider that the stimulation of agricultural production would be assisted by good roads—by better communication between the farms and the cities—such means of communication as would help to keep people from leaving the land, a vastly more important thing than taking people "back to the land."

The question of planning—as distinct from re-planning—is of great importance in the small towns, or in the suburbs of cities, where the bad development always begins, more so than in the large cities, where the bad development is established.

Where is it that the bad development is beginning in most cities in Quebec? The worst development, the most unsanitary, is beginning just over the borders of the towns and cities, in the rural areas, because the towns and cities have no control of that new development. And yet it is precisely that new development which can be most easily controlled by simple regulation, without any cost to the com-

munity. Why do we fail to exercise that control? Perhaps we assume that to do so would be injurious to the real estate business; or that the fact of the real estate operator being less public-spirited than he should be, stands in the way. On that point I will mention one illustration which will show that it is not the lack of public spirit on the part of either the city authorities or the real estate men, but simply the lack of initiative and legal power on the part of the former that presents the chief difficulty.

The Example of Renfrew

In Renfrew, Ont., two new factories were recently erected. These factories brought a large number of working people to Renfrew. As a result, some real estate companies started to subdivide lots all around one side of the town. The town council of Renfrew consulted me, and as a result we had a skeleton plan prepared for their main arterial highways, and they sent the real estate subdivisions for my inspection. The men who were subdividing that land met the advisers of the council and discussed these subdivisions. Instead of having the roads all the same width, we asked for a road 100 ft. wide intersecting the subdivided property to form a boulevard connecting up the different radial thoroughfares of the town. Secondly, we wanted some open space for the people, so that they could enjoy the privilege of having recreation facilities near their homes. Thirdly, we wanted sites reserved for public buildings; also a ravine and the banks of a creek, to be given to the council, partly for public enjoyment and partly to provide land in the best position for laying a main sewer.

They discussed the whole matter with the real estate men; they looked at it from their point of view. They saw the advantages from the point of view of the public. They both agreed, in the end, on everything that was suggested for the public benefit, without involving any immediate cost to the community and to the entire satisfaction of the owners of the real estate. The only obligation entailing ultimate cost which the council entered into, was to build a bridge over a ravine and to maintain the open spaces in a proper manner when they entered into possession of them.

In that small town of about 5,000 inhabitants, they obtained a 100-foot road around the north side of the town, running in part along the top of a ravine, where they wanted it. They persuaded one owner to give the ravine, because it was of no use as building land and he saw that if he gave it before he made his subdivision, it would make the balance of his property more valuable. They obtained the reservation of sites for schools and public buildings, and protected both banks of a creek running through one of the properties. Because that town council had the foresight to say to the real estate men exactly what they wanted, they found that they could get everything that they required. All the objects were accomplished by co-operation—but by co-operation initiated by the local authority.

If in the case of Renfrew, the council had waited five years, or even one year, until that land was developed, it would have had to pay thousands of dollars for the land for open spaces, and would not have got its main arteries at all.

The Real Housing Problem

The housing of the great bulk of the people who cannot afford to live in expensive dwellings and select suburbs, together with the planning of manufacturing, business and working class suburbs, constitute the real problem.

The main factors in promoting industry—if it has not been found out before, it has been found out in the last three years, in connection with war and other things,—the main factors are the factors of the nerve power, the capacity for concentration, the physical endurance of the workman. These are becoming more and more important. Those who have been into a modern machine shop or factory, know that skill does not count for everything; a man has to have that power of nerve and endurance which will enable him to concentrate on his work from morning to night, in order to be an efficient instrument of labor. And those things that are most valuable to the manufacturer are the very things that we are destroying by bad housing conditions in some

*Excerpt from article in the "South Shore Board of Trade Review."